

Mrs. Merriwether's Luncheon

By CAROLYN WELLS

HOW do you do, Mis' Perkins? I'm right down glad to see you. I was just wishin' somebody'd come in to set the afternoon. Hasn't it cleared off beautiful after the rain yesterday? My, how it did rain yesterday! Just the kind of a day to stay in the house and sort rags, or somethin' dry like that. And contrariwise, I was to New York city, a trapesin' round the metropolis in the mud.

You see it was this way—and besides, I just ruined my best shoes, and the curl's all out of my feather. But Grace Nicholls, she's my great-niece, you know—she married one of those Nichollses of Hartford. Well, they're stayin' at the Waldorf for a spell, and she asked me to go with 'em yesterday for a sail up the Hudson. I don't care none too much for steamboatin' myself, but I'm right down fond of Grace, and I hadn't seen her for sometime; so I said I'd go.

Now, well do I know the kind o' meals a body gets to eat on them excursion boats. So I planned I'd carry a box of good things along with me. I knew full well just how Grace would exclaim and say we'd get dinner on the boat and all that; but I knew too just how glad she'd be to eat my fried chicken and sponge cake, and cute little sandwiches, instead of the watery soup and tough meat they give you on those floatin' palaces.

Well, I just laid myself out, fixin' that lunch. Grace's husband, he's awful citified, and I knew the idea of a box of lunch would shock him fearful; but if the lunch was only good enough, it'd mollify the shock. So I had just the best things, and I fixed it all up as dainty as a bride's trousseau. The chicken was fried to just the goldenest brown, and the pieces were folded in oiled paper, and then in Japanese paper napkins. The sandwiches would melt in your mouth, and the angel's food was a dream. Then I had deviled eggs, done awful fancy, like it tells how in the "Ladies' Kitchen Daybook," and cunnin' little fringed papers around 'em. And I had a lobster salad that was like a picture by all the old masters. Well, as you can guess, that lunch filled quite a big box. I confess, I didn't think there was so much of it, till I come to pack it up. But everything was so good I couldn't bear to leave it out. So in they all went, and then I wrapped it up most careful, in a clean, smooth brown paper, and a handsome cord tied around it.

It looked some like rain when I started, but not much. Still, I felt I had to take an umbrella, for I had on my best hat, bein' anxious not to disgrace my city friends. Of course I had to carry a heavy

shawl—I always want it on the boat—and I carried my black silk bag. To be sure, with all those things, the big box of lunch was quite a heft, but I didn't mind, knowin' how it would please them two young people.

Well, Mis' Perkins, to make a long story short, 'fore I got to New York it was pourin' cats an' dogs. My, how it did come down! Of course I knew Grace and Roger wouldn't go in that storm; but I knew there wasn't nothin' for me to do but to go on to the meetin' place, an' wait tranquil till I heard from 'em. I thought maybe Roger would meet me there and tell me what to do. We was to meet at the ticket office on the pier where the excursion boat starts from.

Well, I hadn't much more than got there, when a messenger boy came up to me. "Is this Mrs. Merriwether?" he says, touchin' his cap most polite. "Yes," I says, wonderin' how he knew me.

"Then this here note's for you," he says. "No answer." He poked a letter into my hand, an' went off a whistlin'.

I see right away it was Grace's handwritin', an' I set down the lunch box an' opened the note. It was from Grace, and it said that owin' to the rain we wouldn't go on the excursion, but for me to come right up to the Waldorf and spend the day with her. She apologized for not coming after me herself, but said for me to take a cab right from the pier and I'd have no trouble.

I ain't much used to cabs, but gracious! I ain't afraid of 'em. All you have to do is to tell the driver you won't pay as much as he asks. Of course you do pay it, but it lets him know you ain't a green hand. No, the cab part didn't bother me none, but the lunch did. I couldn't go up to the Waldorf luggin' that enormous box of eatables, and I cast about in my mind to see what I'd do with it. I wanted to give it away, but I wanted to give it to some really deserving person and not to some worthless idler. In fact, it was enough for a whole starvin' family, if I could only find the right family. I felt like an organized charity, as I looked around for some worthy poor.

Well, of course there wasn't nobody on the dock but the men workin' there, an' they all looked prosperous an' well fed, and kind of cross an' grumpy besides. I must say I like a cheerful, pleasant disposition in the people I cast my bread upon the waters to. But bein' as there was nobody around there, I had to go out into the street to look up the right one. So I decided I'd dispose of the box first an' then I'd take a cab and go on up to Grace's. It was full 'erly anyway to go to spend the day, especially in the city.

But when I got out from under cover I had to open my umbrella, for it was still drizzling, and of course I had to hold up my skirt—I had on my second best Henrietta, and it has a silk drop—and with my bag and my shawl and that big box I was so ballasted I did hope I'd find the right charity patient quick.

Well, the first one I saw that seemed about right was a woman newspaper seller. She was in a little booth, with her papers and magazines piled up in front of her. She was as neat and tidy as anybody could wish, and she was knitting, so I knew she was thrifty. I offered her the box, and told her it contained a lot of first class food, enough for her and her family.

Well, if you'll believe me, Mis' Perkins, that woman was mad as hops. She was Irish, and she berated me like I'd offered her a fearful insult. "Is it the likes o' me to be takin' charity?" she says. "Nobody can be dolin' out food to Mary O'Flanagan," she says, "while the's fools livin' to print newspapers an' bigger fools to buy 'em! Take yer cold victuals to somebody as is too lazy to work for an honest livin'!"

Well, Mis' Perkins, I was so surprised I was sort of stunned, for I hadn't no idea of insultin' the poor thing. I scudded away mighty quick, and as it was rainin' some harder then, I got under the elevator road an' stood there while I looked around for some one more thankful an' willin' to receive.

Soon I spied a ragged little chap, lookin' sort of hopeless an' disconsolate, an' I thought if he had the usual allowance of brothers and sisters that I lunch would bring tears of joy to their eyes. So I says, "My little man, are you one of a large family?"

"Nine brudders an' nine sisters, mum," says he, "an' me fader is dead an' me mudder is out o' work."

"Then you're just the boy I'm looking for," I said. "Here's a nice box of lunch for you. Take it right along."

Well, that boy he made no motion to take the box; he only leered at me rudely and said, "Aw, gwan! Quit yer kiddin'! I'm wise to dat kind er guif."

I don't know yet what he meant; but the more I explained that it was a box of good food that anybody might be glad to get, the more he jeered at it. And he talked so queer. He said, "Say, ain't youse de poiple pansy? I ain't hankerin' fer yer



"Lady, You Move On, or I'll Call a Cop!"

old box; I wouldn't swap yer me college pin fer it." And then, when I assured him I didn't want anything in return for it, he just said, "Ah, gwan, gran'ma! Tell de story of yer life an' what's yer real name to somebody younger'n me."

I never heard such talk. I didn't more'n half catch what he meant; but I never could abide boys anyhow, so I looked around for a neat little girl. The first one I saw was a poor little Italian innocent. She wasn't very clean; but I was gettin' so wet standing there in the rain I was most ready to throw away that lovely lunch and go on up to Grace's. Well, I said, "Here, little one, take this nice box of lunch home to your mama."

She turned on me like a little fury. "It's a lie!" she cried. "My mama wouldn't let me take whole bunches of lunch off of a lady! Think shame how you says! It ain't no fer ladies to give lunches off on the street! Say, ain't that fierce! I tells you go away; you ain't stylish!"

That child floored me. I decided I'd try a grown person with some sense, and as I saw a poor looking man passing, I offered the box to him. He looked to be an honest hard working fellow, and yet I quaked as he looked at me. He glared so that I felt as if I must be doing something dishonorable.

Then he said, "Do you mean to give it to me?" in such a tone that I realized it would offend his honest pride to be considered an object of charity.

So I said hastily, "No, I mean to offer it for sale. You may have it for twenty-five cents, though of course it's worth much more."

Now, you know, Mis' Perkins, I had no desire to make money off of that poor man, but I just said that to make him feel more independent about it.

Well, he just glared at me again, and said, "Lady, you don't fool me none; and you just move on, you and your precious bundle, or I'll call a cop and run you in!"

What he meant, Mis' Perkins, or what he thought I had in that box, I don't know; but I can tell you I was scared. I was mad, too. The idea of me, Jane Merriwether, being threatened!

Well, what do you suppose I did next? I just went straight down to the ferry and crossed back over to Jersey. I was so mad I didn't care if I did waste that whole box of food, and I determined to throw it into the middle of the Hudson River and then go back to New York in peace. So when we were half way across on the ferry, I pitched it overboard.

And Mis' Perkins, it did seem as if the witches possessed that box of lunch, for instead of going into the water it landed plump on the lower deck. I was leanin' over the rail to look after it, and the deckman who picked it up saw me, and in a few minutes he brought it up to me. He acted so as if



That Woman Was Mad as Hops.

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Mrs. Merriwether's Luncheon

he was doing me a mighty big favor, and he stood around so expectant that I just had to give him ten cents.

My mind was made up then, and I concluded just to wait till I was the last one, an' then calmly walk off of that boat, leavin' the box on the seat. I did so, and bless you! I hadn't crossed the gangplank before that same deckman was chasin' me with that old box. Of course I had to give him another dime that time. Then I did some mighty quick thinkin', an' a real good plan come to me.

By way of carrying it out, I took a cab at the ferry and started for the Waldorf; but I told the man to stop first at Blankenstein's big department store. My plan was to buy a rug for the dinin' room—I've been wantin' one for quite a spell—and then have that box wrapped up with it and sent out home. I often have small parcels sent out that way, an' they're awful accommodatin' about it.

Well, the plan was a fine one, except that the box had begun to look disreputable. You see, bein' carried about in the rain so long, an' bein' slammed down on the ferryboat deck, it was all muddy and wet, and the paper was torn in lots of places. An' then, somehow, the dressin' of the lobster salad had begun to leak through, and it did look fearful. However, I bought that rug. It wasn't just the kind I wanted, but it was gettin' near noon, an' I knew Grace would be worried, so I just took the first one I laid eyes on that would do at all, an' asked the clerk to send out that parcel too.

He looked at it kind of dubious, an' then he even smelt of it, an' he says, "Is this perishable goods, madam?"

Now, I won't lie for nobody, an' besides the condition of the box pretty much spoke for

itself, so I says firmly and boldly, "It is."

"Then," he says, "we can't send it for you."

"Oh, never mind," I says, quite cool an' unconcerned like, though I was just boilin' to think I'd bought that horrid homely rug all for nothin'." "I'd just as soon carry it."

I marched straight out of that store to a cabman and told him to take me straight up to the Waldorf and to drive like mad. Then I gave the package a flip, an' out it went. I sank back in them carriage cushions mightily relieved to be rid of it at last.

Well, Mis' Perkins, when I stepped out of that cab at the hotel entrance, up comes runnin' a little boy all out o' breath, with that outrageous newspaper bundle. "I seen you drop it out of your cab, ma'am," he said, "an' I brung it to you."

All the porter men an' drivers an' door openers was standin' round, an' I felt just too awful foolish an' embarrassed for anything.

But I couldn't stop to consider them—I was too near meetin' Grace for any half way work. "Bubby," I says, "I want to get rid of that bundle. Here's a dollar for you, if you'll take it away an' dispose of it."

"Sure!" he says, takin' the dollar, an' then winkin' at the men standin' around. "I'll jest drop it in that rubbish can across the street, which is provided for jest such goods."

But just as the boy turned away, the thought of those dainty bits of fried chicken come back to me, an' I couldn't help sayin', "You'd better look in that box before you throw it away."

"Then I straightened my bonnet again, an' I went on in to see Grace. And I was so serene and undisturbed seemin' that she never once suspected what a morning I'd had.

THE FIRST SECRETARY

Continued from page 6

waited outside, till he came forth with an infidel woman—

"Was she beautiful?" Rhasneh cried, a pang of jealousy, the first she had known in her petted life, stabbing her as she had not known that hearts could be stabbed.

"Yes, she was beautiful," Tsatsar-ab-harlem replied judicially; "but old, very old. She must have been twenty-seven or eight. And her beauty compared to your beauty was as the twinkling of a tiny star to the sun; it was as a weed beside the finest rose; it was—"

"And what did they do next?" Rhasneh interrupted impatiently. She could hear of her own charms any time.

"Next they walked till they came to the vapor boat, and on that they embarked. It is likely that they have gone to take their place in line to wait till the great Padishah shall go to say his prayers at the mosque. But, if you wish the young giour to love you, he must come to your feet. Then when he has loved you as long as you desire—" she pointed with an expressive gesture at the Bosphorus.

The old nurse took the hand of her mistress, and soothed her as she would a child. "Of course, you shall keep him as long as you desire; but a few months will be enough, and then you will marry a true believer and become happy."

Rhasneh turned away from her nurse, and her thoughts flew to her world of books, wherein the good people had only one love, pure and all absorbing; and her heart yearned for that civilization of noble men. She shrank from this creature of her environment.

She thought of an incident of her dream that she had paid little attention to before. "Ah, I see the full significance of it," she said to herself. "He did not see me there, as he does not see me now. There I had to call to him in order to awaken his love. I must call to him now, or he will pass by my window and never know that I am here, that I need his help. I must call to him, and he will come to me."

"Tsatsar-ab-harlem, go call Nedjebé and Halma, and order the carriage to be made ready," she commanded. "I will dress and go to Balarah Sultana, and drive with her to the mosque."

Already the slave was through the door, and

before Rhasneh's impatience had time to become alight, she was being made ready for the ceremony.

Rhasneh knew that if the hero of her dream had gone to take his place to watch the Sultan pass, she would be sure to see him during the slow procession of the Sultan's carriages, and her mind was not more than half occupied with her dress while she was being arrayed in the black silk *jeredje* that the Sultan's mother liked to see Osmanli women wear on such occasions as this. When she was veiled with the filmy white yashmak, she surveyed herself in the glass, and was not ill pleased at the effect of her face seen through the gauzy veil. His eyes would hardly pass her over, if once they alighted on her. The mirror echoed the flatteries of her dependents.

Driving fast, with Fahick the eunuch up in front with the coachman, and three of her slaves in the carriage with her, Rhasneh arrived at the apartment of her friend, Balarah Sultana, one of the young sisters of the Sultan, in plenty of time. They greeted each other in the courteous and formal manner of the Mussulman women. Balarah Sultana, as the higher in rank, saluted first, with the graceful *temena*. Rhasneh responded in kind, and then they embraced, and cried out, "Mashallah!" at each other's beauty.

"I came to drive with you to the mosque," Rhasneh said, claiming what was accorded only to the great in the land.

"Your presence will make the ceremony sweeter to me," Balarah Sultana answered.

They entered one of the Sultan's yellow satin lined victorias, and no sooner had issued from the gates of the palace than Rhasneh's eyes began roaming in search of her foreigner. She knew that the carriages of the foreign legations had the inestimable privilege of a near view of the Sultan going to prayers, and that the man she was looking for had some diplomatic position was a natural guess. And Fate, as was to be expected after such a dream, soon aided her. In their slow and intermittent progress, they stopped once within a yard of the carriage wherein were Weir and Mrs. Blake, as has already been told of at the beginning of this story.

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